

Whatcom Ag Water Board SB 6091 Foster Pilot

Joint Legislative Task Force on Water Resource Mitigation September 10, 2019

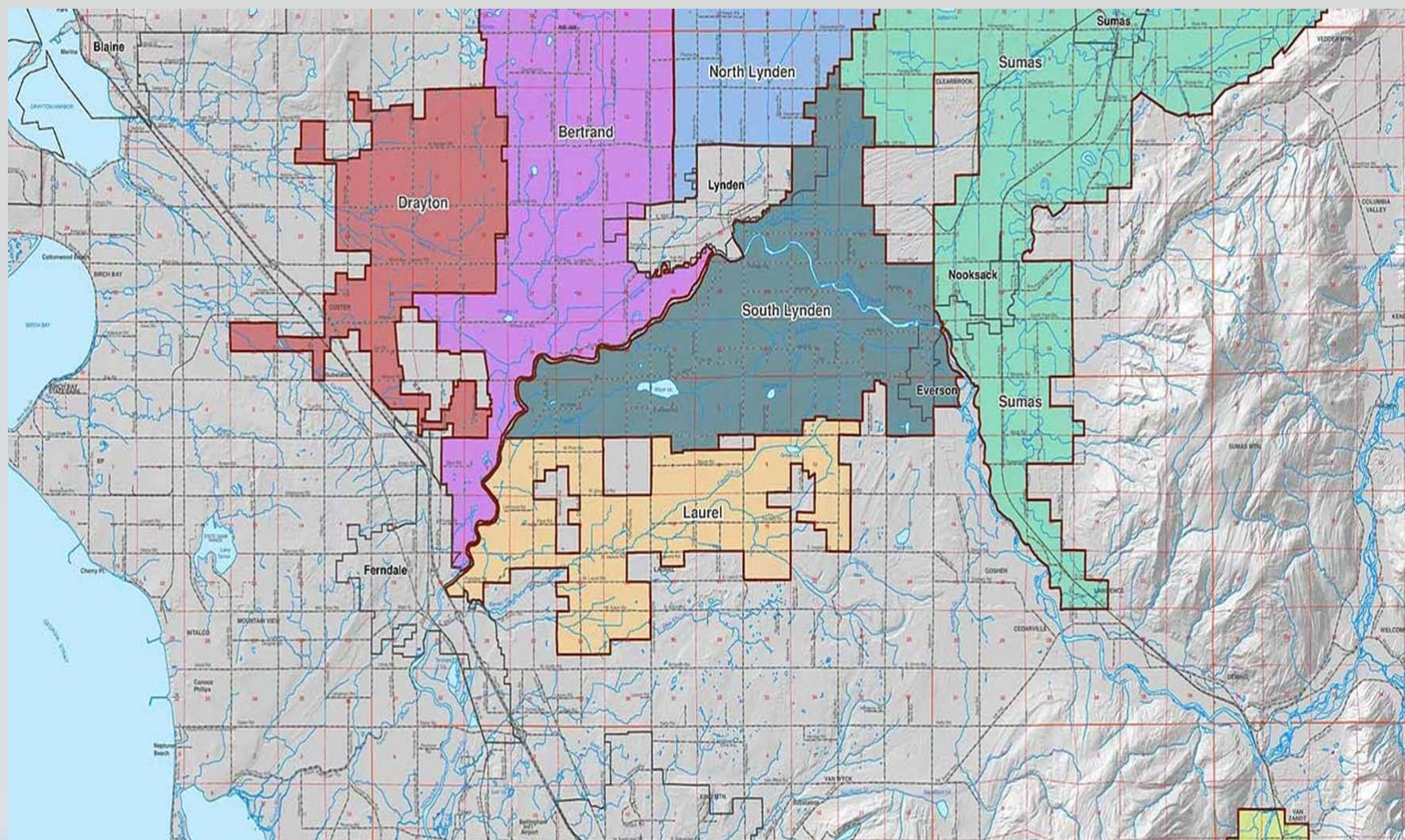


AG WATER BOARD



Whatcom Ag Water Board

- 6 Irrigation Districts in Whatcom County, Districts established by vote of agricultural landowners (+90% approval)
- Original concept of voluntary surface to groundwater changes, combined with tributary flow augmentation, started by Bertrand WID in 2010 and partially funded by Ecology. (3 projects cancelled because of Foster decision)
- Between 2010 and 2016, 2.2 cfs (1000 gpm) changed from direct surface water diversions to deeper groundwater withdrawals.
- 2017 Bertrand WID Flow Augmentation: 1.1 cfs (515 gpm) increase in streamflow from flow augmentation.



The Foster Problem

- ✓ The project increases instream flows through flow augmentation during the critical low flow period of late summer/early fall.
- ✓ The project reduces direct impacts from irrigation withdrawals during critical flow period.
- ✗ But, it could violate the Foster decision by decreasing flows during other times of the year (Late Fall/Early Winter).

Purposes of Pilot Project

- Reduce direct impacts of irrigation withdrawals by converting tributary irrigation surface diversions to deeper groundwater withdrawals;
- Use direct flow augmentation to increase instream flows for fish in critical tributaries, without the permanent loss of agricultural water rights;
- In many areas of Washington State, mitigation of new exempt wells results in permanent loss of agricultural water rights – SB 6091 has potential to continue this trend;
- Integrate streamflow restoration efforts with habitat restoration through Drainage Based Management = Net Ecological Benefit

Status of Pilot Project

- Pilot Project is partially funded as a SB 6091 project under RCW 90.94, as a project to offset impacts of new domestic exempt wells in Nooksack Basin.
- Scope of work for 19-20 currently being developed;
- Applications to be filed during 2020;
- Addition funding needed for certain capital costs, farmers will continue funding support;
- Location of projects included in local Drainage Based Management (DBM) planning.

Questions?

